

August 8, 2006

Docket Clerk
Docket No. RITA-2006-25247
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 Seventh Street, SW., Room PL-401
Washington, DC 20590-0001

As others have stated in their comments, the draft of “U.S. Department of Transportation ~Strategic Research, Development, and Technology Plan 2006 – 2010” includes many references to three vital elements of the research process:

- Sharing of information and research results (pp. xiv, 80, 97)
- Disseminating data, information and knowledge (pp. 11, 21, 24, 31, 41, 71, 76, 108)
- Avoiding unnecessary duplication of research (pp. v, xiv, xv, 1, 93, 94, 97, 98, 101)

I was surprised and concerned to search the draft version of the document and find not even one instance of the word “library,” and therefore no mention of the National Transportation Library. According to Section 5601 of SAFETEA-LU, RITA (through its management of BTS) “shall facilitate and promote access to the Library, with the goal of improving the ability of the transportation community to share information,” and will also “work with other transportation libraries and transportation information providers, both public and private,” to achieve the goal of greater information sharing.

Libraries and librarians are a crucial part of any research endeavor. Librarians are trained to find information resources in many formats (such as print, audio-visual, and electronic), and to evaluate the authority of an item’s author or issuing body. If an engineer asks if research has been done on a certain topic, and perhaps by a particular agency, I know where to search, and *how* to search, to find the necessary information more quickly than the engineer searching on his or her own. If the engineer is planning to perform research on that topic, my search results will enable the requestor to see what has already been done by others. This helps to avoid unnecessary duplication of research, and saves staff time and agency dollars.

Because all the new research reports received by my library pass through my hands, and many of the newly-acquired documents in our electronic library are downloaded by me, I’m in a key position to know what kinds of research studies are being done by other agencies and universities, and to share new reports with my agency’s staff if it seems closely aligned with their interests or recent projects. This part of my role encompasses all three of the elements listed above: sharing information and research results, disseminating information to those who would best use or apply it, and avoiding potential duplication of research by informing key staff in my agency what others have already done on a given topic.

Having seen RITA's Response to TRB Special Report 284, [*Transportation Knowledge Networks: A Management Strategy for the 21st Century*](#), which appeared after this draft of the Strategic Plan, I am hopeful that the final version of the Plan *will* include some mention of the NTL. Special Report 284 indicates that NTL could manage the structure "if adequately funded and supported" (p. 51), while RITA's Response states, "RITA proposes that the NTL continue in its leadership role and serve as the national coordinating structure envisioned by the report." This implies that the NTL will be adequately funded, after years of what Special Report 284 calls "stop-and-start funding" (p. 53). I sincerely hope this is true.

Sustained funding will result in the growth of the NTL, formation and development of Transportation Knowledge Networks, the addition of more libraries to the Transportation Libraries Catalog (TLCat) database in the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), and further cataloging and classification of their holdings. In turn, these positive changes will lead to greater information sharing among transportation professionals, more systematic and focused dissemination of data and information resources, and access to the widest possible range of research reports and results, which will help to avoid unnecessary duplication of research and wasted research dollars. Funding transportation libraries, and staffing them with professional librarians, is a sound research investment. One study indicates that the benefits to cost ratio can be as much as 12:1 (see "What Does Mn/DOT Library Accomplish?" at: http://www.dot.state.mn.us/library/mndot_library_benefits.html).

In 1931, a librarian from India named S. R. Ranganathan shared with the library world his "Five Laws of Library Science." The fourth of these is, "Save the time of the reader." (There are many websites which reference Ranganathan and the Five Laws, but I like this short article by Frank Exner, from November 2005, found at: <http://associates.ucr.edu/1105cexn.htm>.) To me, one of the most important elements of customer service is to save the customer's time. By saving them time, I also save the agency money. The Five Laws may sound quaint today, perhaps to many librarians and information professionals as well as to non-librarians, but I believe they're still the cornerstone of what I do: I respond to reference questions and conduct literature searches for people requesting information; I share resources with those who are best able to apply that information; and I "Save the time of the researcher," by finding what the requestor needs, and getting it to them faster, and at lower cost, than they can get it for themselves.

Growing the NTL, and developing Transportation Knowledge Networks, will benefit all of the agencies involved, and all the researchers they serve. Please keep this in mind as the Strategic Plan is finalized.

Marie B. Manthe
4000 SW 39th St.
Topeka, KS 66610
785 266 4505
mbmanthe@cox.net